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ABSTRACT

Part of the plan by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to prepare training materials and conduct conferences on improving teachers' use of standardized tests was to survey a representative sample of elementary/secondary teachers. This survey ascertains teacher preparation and knowledge in testing, teacher assessment of the importance of testing to teaching, and teacher attitudes toward various testing issues. Findings indicate that teachers seem to be generally supportive of standardized tests, and understand the need for quality standards in education. Specifically, it was found that teachers want useful information in three areas: (1) diagnosing individual student needs; (2) planning instructional activities and programs, and (3) placing and grouping students. Results of the survey support the notion of testing an an integral part of instructional programs. Teachers appear to be somewhat supportive of minimum competency testing, but see many serious flaws in most current programs in this area. (Author/GK)

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TEACHERS AND TESTING

A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

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A REPORT OF THE
RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF THE
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TEACHERS AND TESTING: A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

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In the last decade, the subject of the testing of students for aptitude, achievement, and ability has been one of the enduring issues for controversy. While almost all involved in education have recognized the many limitations of current testing technology and the many abuses made of student testing, some have called for the severe curtailment or elimination of testing while others have favored reforms in the process. The reaction to problems in testing has been similar to the response of the Progressive reformers in the first decade of this century who were genuinely concerned about the corruption in government and other social ills they saw in American cities. Some were so appalled they favored the elimination of cities and a return to an illusory pastoral innocence. Others saw the reality of the urban milieu and worked for reforms in governance and administration to correct the sicknesses of the cities. History has vindicated the pragmatic reformers and so, it seems, it will also in testing.

In 1973, the AFT Executive Council adopted a resolution directing the AFT and its staff to study and disseminate information on the use of intelligence, aptitude, and achievement tests. In a 1976 resolution on testing, the AFT called for the responsible use of tests and implored test developers and publishers to improve the understanding of tests among teachers as well as the population at large. This resolution also called upon test developers to improve obvious deficiencies in tests and listed a number of reforms the AFT favored.

This concern for the proper and appropriate use of high quality tests for students led to further action by the AFT.

In 1978, the AFT applied for and received a two year grant from the National Institute of Education to prepare training materials and conduct conferences on improving teachers use of standardized tests. Part of the plan was to survey a representative sample of teachers to ascertain their preparation and knowledge in testing, their assessment of the importance of testing to their teaching

tasks, and their attitudes toward various issues in testing.

The development of the survey instrument and the design of the survey sample were done by the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California at Los Angeles.

In the fall of 1979, 800 survey instruments were mailed to a sample chosen systematically from the AFT membership files to be representative of all AFT members in elementary and secondary teaching. Returned and useable survey forms numbered 209 (26.1 percent), and this analysis is based on that total.

Sample Demography

Those who returned completed survey forms were evenly distributed over all grades in elementary and secondary schools. The distribution showed that 46 percent were elementary school (K-6) teachers, 45 percent taught in secondary schools (7-12), 7 percent taught in both, and 3 percent did not state the grade level taught.

Those surveyed were also asked to indicate the socio-economic status of the community their school serves. The respondents were primarily in communities with middle or low socio-economic status. High socio-economic status communities were indicated by 6 percent of the respondents, middle socio-economic status by 45 percent, low socio-economic status by 39 percent, and 10 percent did not complete this item.

Respondents were also requested to state whether the community the school serves could be characterized as urban, suburban, or rural. According to the responses, 51 percent taught in urban communities, 34 percent in suburban communities, 9 percent in rural communities, and 7 percent did not state community type.

Education and Training in Testing

Before ascertaining the knowledge and attitudes of the respondents, the survey determined the extent of education and training the teachers had in testing.

As Table 1 shows, 29 percent of teachers surveyed had taken no college courses devoted exclusively to testing and measurement and 70 percent had taken no inservice session on the subject. Of the remainder, most (52 percent

Table 1. Education and Training Devoted Exclusively to Testing and Measurement

	College Courses Taken		Inservice Sessions Taken	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
None*	61	29%	147	70%
1	61	29	21	10
2	48	23	17	8
3 or More	39	19	24	12

*Includes no response

Table 2. Education and Training Devoted In Part to Testing and Measurement

	College Courses Taken		Inservice Sessions Taken	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
None*	49	23%	135	65%
1	44	21	27	13
2	38	18	16	8
3 or more	78	37	31	15

*Includes no response

of the total respondents) had taken 1 or 2 college courses in testing and only 19 percent had more than 2 courses. The record on inservice courses, as shown in Table 1, is even worse.

Those surveyed were also asked to indicate the number of college courses and inservice sessions taken devoted in part to testing and measurement. The results are shown in Table 2. The record here is somewhat better. Only 23 percent had no college courses devoted in part to testing, but 65 percent had no inservice devoted in part to testing.

While no cross-tabulations were done, it appears as though about 1 teacher in 5 has had no formal college training in testing and measurement and that after college that only about 1 in 3 ever get any inservice training in the area. It is clear that more training for teachers in testing is needed, particularly at the inservice level, to improve the use of tests.

Teacher Expertise in Testing

Nine issues or topics in testing were chosen and teachers in the survey were asked to indicate their assessment of the importance to them of expertise in those areas and were also asked to assess their own expertise in each of those areas. Those results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

As shown in Table 3, teachers felt that "how to select good tests" and "how to judge the appropriateness of required tests" were the most important areas in which teachers should have expertise, followed by "how standardized tests are developed," "how to evaluate minimum competency testing program," and "how to interpret norm and percentile scores." Also rated high were "how technical qualities of a test influence what scores mean" and "how to use test results in instructional planning." The only topics rated less than 3 in importance (on a scale of 1 to 4) were "truth in testing legislation" and "what rights and responsibilities are associated with testing."

As Table 4 shows, only one topic was rated by teachers as high as 3 on the same 1 to 4 scale in their own estimated level of expertise. The area rated at 3.0 was "how to use test results in instructional planning." Other areas ranked high in estimated expertise were "how to interpret norm and percentile scores," "how to judge the appropriateness of required tests," and "how to select good tests." Particularly low levels of expertise were indicated

Table 3. Teachers' Rating of Importance of Expertise in Areas of Testing

Area of Testing	Average Rating (1=Low, 4=High)	Percentage Indicating High Importance	Low Importance
How to select good tests	3.4	57%	5%
How to judge the appropriateness of required tests	3.4	52	4
How standardized tests are developed	3.3	46	6
How to evaluate minimum competency testing programs	3.2	41	4
How to interpret norm and percentile scores	3.2	40	4
How the technical qualities of a test influence what score means	3.1	37	7
How to use test results in instructional planning	3.1	34	7
Truth-in-testing legislation	2.8	23	12
What rights and responsibilities are associated with testing	2.7	22	15

Table 4. Teachers' Estimated Level of Expertise in Areas of Testing

Area of Testing	Average Rating (1=low, 4=High)	Percentage Indicating High Expertise	Low Expertise
How to use test results in instructional planning	3.0	27%	7%
How to interpret norm and percentile scores	2.8	24	12
How to judge the appropriateness of required tests	2.7	21	11
How to select good tests	2.5	12	15
How the technical qualities of a test influence what score means	2.4	12	20
How to evaluate minimum competency testing programs	2.3	12	22
What rights and responsibilities are associated with testing	2.2	13	27
How standardized tests are developed	2.1	7	32
Truth-in-testing legislation	1.9	6	41

for "how standardized tests are developed" and "truth-in-testing legislation."

The greatest discrepancy exists in the area of "how standardized tests are developed" where importance was rated at 3.3, but expertise at 2.1. Other areas where a great discrepancy was indicated included "how to select good tests," "how to evaluate minimum competency testing programs," and "truth-in-testing legislation."

Use of Standardized Tests

Survey recipients were asked compared to other information they have about students, to what extent do they use standardized test results in their instructional planning. On a scale from 1 (unimportant) to 4 (important), the uses were rated as follows:

Diagnosis of individual needs	2.8
Student placement/grouping	2.7
Determining class needs	2.5
Judging student progress	2.5
Modification of your course content	2.4
Evaluation of your instructional program	2.4

Teachers indicate greater use of test results for individual student decision than for group decisions.

Factors Which Inhibit Use of Standardized Tests

Conversations with teachers often reveal that teachers feel that standardized tests have problems that inhibit their usefulness to them. Survey respondents were asked to indicate, from a list of eleven problems, which major problems prevent them from more fully using standardized test results. Table 5 presents those results.

The two factors mentioned most often relate to the desire by classroom teachers for more useful information on diagnosis of individual student strengths and weaknesses and prescriptive information to provide guidance for corrective action.

There was also concern with the timing of return of test results, if they are returned to the teachers at all, the test/curriculum match, and the appropriateness of test materials for some students.

It is clear from these results that teachers use standardized test results

Table 5. Factors Which Inhibit Teacher Use of Standardized Tests

	Factor	Percentage Indicating Factor As A Major Problem
1.	Results do not provide an adequate profile of student strengths and weaknesses.	63%
2.	Results do not provide prescriptive information, e.g. guidance as to what materials, instructional activities are needed.	52
3.	Results are returned too late to be useful, or are not returned to teachers.	51
4.	Test content does not match my curriculum.	47
5.	Test materials are inappropriate and/or biased for at least some of my students.	46
6.	Comparison groups (norms) provided by the tests are not meaningful.	29
7.	Results are not reported in a form that facilitates interpretation.	29
8.	Results do not give me any new information about my students.	27
9.	Tests are given at the wrong time of the year.	26
10.	Tests take too long to administer.	23
11.	Technical quality of tests is inadequate.	17

to help make decisions about individual students relating to diagnosis of needs, grouping, and placement, but that teachers recognize the limitations of such tests for these purposes. There seems to be a clearly perceived need for more and better information about students and a desire to improve standardized tests to provide that information.

Minimum Competency Testing

Slightly below 60 percent of the teachers surveyed stated that their school district has a minimum competency testing program, and in 81 percent of these cases it is state mandated.

	Number	Percent
No minimum competency testing program	84	40
Has minimum competency testing program	125	60
State mandated	101	48
Locally mandated	24	11

Those in districts with minimum competency testing programs were asked to answer a series of questions about their program. Those results are presented in Table 6.

The results show the following findings:

- o teachers were not involved in selecting competencies.
- o teachers were not involved in setting passing scores.
- o teachers are mixed as to whether competencies reflect classroom goals.
- o competency test results seem to provide information for planning remedial work, but teachers receive little assistance in doing this.
- o teachers are mixed as to whether school programs have changed much as a result of competency tests, and are also mixed about whether important curricular goals have been ignored.
- o teachers are divided, with slight leaning toward a positive opinion, about whether competency tests will increase quality instruction.

Given these findings, it is interesting to look at teachers' general attitude toward minimum competency testing. These results are presented in Table 7. While a large segment of teachers expressed a neutral attitude (34 percent),

Table 6. Details About Minimum Competency Testing Programs

	Percentage of Respondents Indicating				
	To A Great Extent	Mostly Yes	Mostly No	Not At All	Not Sure/ No Response
a. Were teachers involved in selecting the competencies to be tested?	5%	11%	10%	45%	29%
b. Were teachers involved in setting passing scores?	4	9	10	43	34
c. Do the competencies reflect your classroom goals for students?	11	32	22	20	15
d. Do the results provide sufficient information so that remedial work for students can be planned?	17	27	26	8	22
e. Has your school or instructional program changed because of the test?	17	21	24	23	15
f. Have important curricular goals been ignored due to emphasis on minimum competency?	14	20	19	29	17
g. Do you receive assistance in interpreting the test results and/or planning remedial work for students?	9	15	23	39	15
h. Do you think minimum competency testing will help promote higher quality instruction for students?	18	28	18	17	18

Table 7. Teacher Attitudes Toward Minimum Competency Testing

Attitude	Number	Percent
Very Favorable	38	18%
Favorable	40	19
Neutral	71	34
Unfavorable	24	12
Very Unfavorable	16	8
No Response	20	10

some 37 percent indicated a generally favorable attitude and 20 percent an unfavorable attitude.

Conclusion

Teachers seem to be generally supportive of standardized tests. They understand the need for quality standards in education and they want more useful information about their students. Particularly, teachers want information to help them in:

- o diagnosing individual student needs
- o planning instructional activities and programs
- o placing and grouping students.

To teachers, testing should be an integral part of the instructional programs and there should be a high match between tests and the curriculum. Teachers seem somewhat supportive of minimum competency testing, but they see many serious flaws in most current programs in this area.

Most significantly, teachers want to improve standardized tests, not eliminate them.

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